

# Authentication and Analysis of Purported Undercover Telephone Calls Made to Hospitals in China on the Topic of Organ Trafficking

Matthew P. Robertson  
China Studies Research Fellow  
Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation  
300 New Jersey Avenue NW, Suite 900. Washington, DC 20001  
matthew.robertson@victimsofcommunism.org

February 2020

## Abstract

The People's Republic of China operates one of the largest organ transplantation systems in the world as measured by transplant volume, yet its operations are cloaked in official secrecy. A great deal of contention has surrounded the source of the organs, whether voluntary donors, death row prisoners, or prisoners of conscience. It is difficult to gather reliable data about the operations of China's transplant program, and Chinese authorities have been found to disseminate falsified donor registry datasets. One source which may shed light on empirical questions about China's transplant system is a cache of telephone calls made by investigators to transplant hospitals in China. The investigators pose in a range of plausible identities, and make enquiries about organ availability, health, and donor source. The matter of whether these telephone calls may be used as valid evidence in social scientific research is not immediately clear, given questions of source and selection bias, and even the basic facticity of the calls themselves. This working paper aims to establish whether or not the audio files are in fact what they purport to be — that is, actual calls to hospitals in China — and considers issues associated with their potential use by researchers.

Key words: organ trafficking, human rights, authoritarian secrecy, contentious politics, source verification

About the author: Matthew P. Robertson is a China Studies Research Fellow with the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation. He is concurrently a Ph.D. student in political science at the Australian National University in Canberra. His research interests include biopolitics, political violence, and authoritarian politics; his dissertation, using computational methods and process tracing, explores the political logic of state control over citizen bodies in the case of China's organ transplantation industry.

## Table of Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>1. Introduction</b>                                  | <b>3</b>  |
| 1.1. About WOIPFG and its investigative process         | 6         |
| <b>2. Authenticating the calls</b>                      | <b>7</b>  |
| 2.1. Methods of authentication                          | 7         |
| 2.2. Results  | 8         |
| 2.2.1. Call assay                                       | 8         |
| 2.2.2. Observation                                      | 9         |
| 2.2.3. Telephone record review                          | 9         |
| 2.2.4. Telephone record access                          | 9         |
| 2.2.5. Admission of call veracity by a Chinese official | 10        |
| 2.2.6. Cancelled: Forensic verification                 | 11        |
| 2.3. Discussion of the authenticity of the calls        | 12        |
| <b>3. Themes for further study</b>                      | <b>13</b> |
| 3.1. Analysis of call content                           | 13        |
| 3.2. Questions of bias                                  | 13        |
| <b>4. References</b>                                    | <b>17</b> |

**Senator MOORE:** *When people contact the department with the evidence that they have, do people follow up on the claims that are made about particular hospitals, particular surgeons and particular travel routes? Is that investigated?*

**Mr Fletcher:** *No. There are some other governments that have done that and said, 'We spent X number of weeks following it up and we found it didn't hold water.' I've looked at the reports as well, and often it's someone ringing up from overseas. Who are they really speaking to? It's not the kind of evidence you'd put into a courtroom.*

— Australian parliamentary Hansard, June 8, 2018<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

Since 2006, allegations have been made by investigators, eye-witnesses, activists, and Falun Gong-associated research and media organizations, that the Chinese Communist Party has been engaged in the widespread extrajudicial killing of prisoners of conscience (primarily practitioners of Falun Gong, but others also) for the purpose of trafficking their organs.

One of the strands of evidence adduced by researchers for these alleged crimes has been covert telephone calls made by investigators to doctors and nurses in Chinese hospitals, engaged in the discussion of organ transplantation. The investigators assume a range of identities, including fellow doctors, potential patients, concerned relatives calling on behalf of potential patients, Party disciplinary officials engaged in anti-corruption investigations, and domestic security officials requesting expedited transplant procedures for their relatives. The targets they call range from low-level nurses answering the switchboard in hospital wards, to senior transplant officials reached on their cell phones, to high-ranking Communist Party and military officials reached at (presumably) their offices.

Evidence of extrajudicial killing in the procurement of organs in China is the subject of a report by Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation titled “Organ Procurement and Extrajudicial Execution in China: A Review of the Evidence.” This report does not recapitulate the findings or evidence discussed there. Rather, it is primarily an attempt to respond to the concerns above crystallized by Mr. Graham Fletcher, formerly the First Assistant Secretary in the North Asia Division of Australia’s Department of Foreign

---

<sup>1</sup> Joint Standing Committee On Foreign Affairs, Defence And Trade, “Human Organ Trafficking and Organ Transplant Tourism (Jun 08, 2018).” From the context of Mr. Fletcher’s remarks, it appears the “other governments” his department consulted as to their own study of the organ harvesting allegations include those of at least the US and the UK. It is not clear what evidence those governments considered or how they made their evaluation of it, given that such work is not a matter of public record. Moreover, Mr. Fletcher’s remarks appear to conflate the allegations on the whole with the particular strand of evidence — purported undercover telephone calls — considered in this report.

Affairs and Trade (currently Australia's ambassador to China), in his skepticism toward both the veracity of the calls and their evidentiary value.

Thus, this report seeks to answer the following questions: are the hundreds of calls that have been made into China since 2006 by overseas investigators, apparently eliciting remarkable admissions of culpability in human and organ trafficking by Chinese doctors, nurses, and officials, in fact genuine? Who makes the calls? Why and how do they make them? How can we — as scholars, analysts, policymakers — be *sure* they are real? If they are real, what can we glean from them about China's organ transplantation industry? As averred by Mr. Fletcher, it is indeed an open question whether or not such audio recordings and transcripts could in fact constitute “the kind of evidence you'd put into a courtroom.” At the same time, it is even more questionable that the standard we use to judge the veracity of these purported calls should be one of their admissibility in an adversarial legal process.

This report has a more modest aim: we simply seek to discover whether WOIPFG has actually been making hundreds of calls to China as they claim, and to make our methods public. Settling this question is a precondition to potential use of the calls by scholars, journalists, and policymakers, who may take an interest in the potential evidence the calls provide of ongoing organ trafficking in Chinese hospitals.

What transpires in any given telephone call differs significantly based on the identities of the investigator and target. A typical case might be a caller posing as the concerned relative (or doctor) of a patient in need of a transplant, enquiring as to whether a liver for a patient with cirrhosis and type-B blood is available, when, and at what cost. Once this information is acquired, the caller may then proceed to gather as much other information as possible, again under the guise of assuring themselves and their relative of the qualifications of the facility whose services they seek. These questions may include: How many transplants did the ward perform last year? How long has the nurse/doctor been involved in transplant surgeries? How long has the hospital been performing transplants? Are the donors healthy? Will they be from living donors? Sometimes they ask whether the organs are “from Falun Gong.”

Calls typically last between 3 and 10 minutes, though they sometimes last for up to 30 minutes. If the ruse has been successfully maintained, they may end with an agreement that the patient will personally come to the hospital for a check-up — indeed, physical presence in the hospital is often demanded by medical staff before they will discuss details, an objection that investigators must come up with creative ways of overcoming in order to gather the information they seek. In some cases, the calls begin as routine enquiries and end in moralistic exhortation, as the caller discards their identity as independent fact-gatherer and reveals themselves to be an impassioned activist intent on stopping the alleged crimes of organ harvesting taking place. Investigators also share telephone numbers and other data with other voluntary activist networks, who forgo the questioning and directly engage in moral persuasion with doctors, or play through the phone pre-recorded statements describing the alleged crimes of organ harvesting.

All of the calls examined in this report were made by investigators and activists associated with the World Organization to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong (WOIPFG). WOIPFG is a network of volunteers around the world, many if not all of whom practice the spiritual discipline Falun Gong. They work with practitioners of Falun Gong in China to obtain phone numbers of hospital transplant wards and the personal cell phones of Chinese officials, or obtain them from hospital websites, or during calls with doctors and nurses at hospitals. Between September 2018 and December 2019 VOC interviewed half a dozen of the investigators involved in this effort, but only one, Dr. Wang Zhiyuan, the executive director of WOIPFG, was willing to be identified by name for reasons of security. This condition was stipulated by Dr. Wang prior to the beginning of VOC's authentication process.

Questions as to source credibility and reliability naturally arise in the minds of skeptical social science researchers, journalists, and government officials when dealing with the work produced by volunteer activists deeply committed to exposing what they believe are crimes against humanity being perpetrated against their coreligionists in their home country. This report was written with such concerns in mind.

There are two analytically separate components when handling these calls. The first is about establishing whether or not the audio recordings made available by WOIPFG are what they purport to be: i.e., discussions between investigators outside of China, assuming false identities, cold calling Chinese hospitals and engaging in discussions with actual doctors and nurses. The alternative possibility is that the recordings may have been falsified by the investigators — being pre-arranged calls with known parties in China who are play-acting in order to assist WOIPFG in their claims of crimes against humanity. The possibility of the calls being falsified was tested using every available means.

The separate question — *after* authenticating the audio files as actual telephone calls — relates to their evidentiary value. This touches on questions to do with selection bias, the protocol of questions for successful calls, and how the responses of Chinese doctors and nurses might be plausibly interpreted. All of these issues are at stake when assessing what reliable information about China's organ transplantation system can actually be gleaned from these calls, and requires triangulating the information obtained through the calls with other data about Chinese hospitals.

This report is focused primarily on the first issue, that is, authenticating that the audio files are actually telephone calls to medical workers in China. Questions of bias and how the evidentiary value of the calls might be considered are addressed at the end. Analysis of WOIPFG's data is only in reference to the original Chinese call transcripts, and we have not consulted the English-language translations provided by WOIPFG.

Clearly the use of covert telephone calls to hospitals is an unorthodox method of research. If such a method of data gathering were to be used in an academic setting it

would have to be pre-registered, subjected to a full ethics review, and adhere to a scientific methodology. There would be clear procedures for how numbers to call are obtained, how call data is stored, and how the data obtained is to be analyzed. In part because WOIPFG's research has primarily been conducted in order to expose grave abuses, investigators did not carry out their work with the kinds of considerations that would shape an academic research project in mind. This leads to a range of questions when attempting to use this material in a social science setting.

### **1.1. About WOIPFG and its investigative process**

WOIPFG is a voluntary, global network of activists and advocates, many of whom practice Falun Gong, a “Buddhist-based practice of meditation and moral living.”<sup>2</sup> It is thus not, nor does it purport to be, a professional human rights research organization with paid staff trained in social science research methods. Its approach to research and information gathering often overlaps with human rights advocacy and occasionally religiously-inspired moral suasion. WOIPFG clearly states that the goal of its work is to gather evidence of crimes and bring to justice the perpetrators of the persecution against Falun Gong.<sup>3</sup> The result is that WOIPFG does not understand its role to be as an objective gatherer of scientific information, but rather an investigator gathering evidence of criminality. This adversarial orientation inevitably has downstream effects on how information has been gathered, stored, and presented to the public.

Interviews with WOIPFG staff indicate that there has never been a systematic or methodical process by which the calls are made. For instance, cover identities are sometimes thought up on the fly, and changed and discarded as the circumstances dictate. The calls do not proceed through a series of pre-established questions, because the investigators are responding to the reactions of the recipient and judging the best methods of gaining the information they seek. The approach made to a nurse may differ significantly that made to a doctor, for instance. Of the roughly half-dozen investigators that VOC was able to establish have been involved in the calling, the bulk of the calls were made by four individuals. They appear to only loosely coordinate their activities, cover identities, and methods of questioning. The learning process for the investigators has been on-the-job, given that there is clearly no training program for posing as the relative of a potential transplant patient and extracting information from Chinese hospital staff.

Recordkeeping by investigators can also be idiosyncratic. Dr. Wang requests of all investigators that they preserve the records of their calls — though it appears that for at least a year one of the most prolific callers did not do so, assuming that he or she would

---

<sup>2</sup> “Falun Gong” here refers in broad terms to the community of individuals who practice the Falun Gong exercises and adhere to Falun Gong religious beliefs. We note and are aware that there is no central Falun Gong organization or entity, and accept that there is a degree of imprecision implied by the use of the term. We defer to Falun Gong’s self-definition for characterizing the practice, per Falun Dafa Information Center, “What Is Falun Gong?”

<sup>3</sup> WOIPFG, “追查迫害法轮功国际组织成立声明 [Statement on the Establishment of the World Organization to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong].”

be able to download the call log at any time. The pitfall of this assumption was that the particular software used to call into China only preserved the last six months of records, leading to many of the call records being lost. These outcomes are likely driven in part by the fact that investigators have never operated under an assumption that their methods would be questioned or the authenticity of their calls doubted, and a lack of familiarity with technology. They sometimes thus found the demands of verification by VOC researchers to be novel. Indeed, Dr. Wang had not previously video recorded his own investigatory process. After VOC requested to observe a number of calls personally and make a video of it, he soon arranged for New Tang Dynasty Television to record five of his calls with two witnesses.<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes this lack of familiarity with the demands of a skeptical audience resulted in miscommunications — reminders of the gap in assumptions between cultural and professional contexts. For instance, a basic assumption of any analyst attempting to establish the veracity of the audio files purporting to be calls would be that they had not been altered in any way unless expressly stated. Hence, we were surprised to discover that in many of the call audio files, the names of aliases used by investigators were often redacted, and that Dr. Wang found this alteration entirely unremarkable. The reason for the alteration is understandable — to hamper the efforts of Chinese authorities to learn the cover identities of the callers — and we do not believe this detracts from the veracity of the calls; yet it heightened our awareness of the difference in baseline assumptions between the investigators and the analyst.

The above factors are important background considerations when dealing with these materials. They highlight the challenges when working across cultural backgrounds, but they do not prevent us from establishing that the audio files presented by WOIPFG are in fact audio recordings of telephone calls made to medical workers in China and discussing the contribution they make to understanding a subject that resists simplistic research approaches.

## 2. Authenticating the calls

Our attempt to authenticate the calls involved the following steps. The outcomes of these steps are described in the Results.

### 2.1. Methods of authentication

1. CALL ASSAY. We identified a sample<sup>5</sup> of 50 audio files (see Appendix 1) of purported calls placed to hospitals or doctors and for each of these engaged in the

---

<sup>4</sup> WOIPFG, “追查国际调查取证中共活摘器官现场录像 (1-5) [On-Site Video of WOIPFG Investigation of Organ Harvesting (1-5)].”

<sup>5</sup> Given that WOIPFG does not provide (or have) a master list of all the calls it has made, it was not possible to make a purely random sample to assay, and this may not have been desirable in any case. Instead, VOC identified the most recent round of calls primarily made by Dr. Wang Zhiyuan, as well as a convenience sample of about 30 other calls made between 2007 and 2017.

following:

- a. Where the phone numbers associated with the call belonged to hospital switchboards or the departments responsible for organ transplantation or hepatobiliary or renal surgery, dialed the numbers to confirm that they belonged to the hospital in question.
  - b. Where the phone numbers belonged to Chinese surgeons, dialed the numbers in an attempt to confirm the identity of the individual who answered. Securing a direct answer to the question of the identity of the call recipient sometimes proved difficult and in such cases the outcome was noted and timestamped.<sup>6</sup> Where possible VOC staff attempted to trace the cell phone number to a call to a hospital phone number, which *could* be confirmed per 'a.' above.
  - c. Made notes as to other methods (below) for establishing the veracity of the calls.
2. OBSERVATION. Observed calls made by investigators, both on site and via a secure voice conference software used by WOIPFG investigators;
  3. TELEPHONE RECORD REVIEW. Reviewed call records generated by the telephone or software company used to make the calls, and compared them to the audio recordings for date of call, length of call, and telephone numbers dialed;
  4. TELEPHONE RECORD ACCESS. To eliminate the possibility that the digital or paper telephone records provided to VOC by WOIPFG investigators may themselves have been falsified, VOC in some cases a) requested and obtained the investigator's access credentials and directly logged into the relevant secure portal to download such records, b) observed (via screen sharing) investigators entering their credentials and gaining access to these records in real time, c) personally observed investigators gaining access to these records;
  5. SWORN STATEMENT. We requested that the callers sign their names to a statement attesting to the claim that they made the calls they purported to make. It was only possible to have Dr. Wang Zhiyuan sign this statement, given requests that the identities of the other investigators be protected.

One promising step initially conceived was forensic audio verification. As originally anticipated, this measure would have provided a definitive answer to the question of the identity of the call recipient, by using biometric authentication to verify it against a known public audio record of that individual. Unfortunately, this method of verification was unable to be executed for technical reasons explained below.

## 2.2. Results

### 2.2.1. Call assay

VOC created a table of 51 calls made by 3-4 WOIPFG investigators. Only Dr. Wang is identified by name. Each row contains the call number, name of doctor or nurse (if obtained), their title and institution, the call date, the number dialed, the identity of the

---

<sup>6</sup> Times are in Eastern Daylight Time unless otherwise noted.

caller, the URL to the mp3 audio of the call, the URL to the transcript of the call (in Chinese and English where available), whether we were able to visually verify the same call date, length, and telephone number on phone records, whether we were able to verify that the phone number belongs to a doctor or hospital, and any notes about the call.

This assemblage of calls was not derived through a random sampling process — a task that would have been somewhat difficult due to the lack of an available uniform structure for all of WOIPFG’s call data. Technically it is a convenience sample. Seventeen of the calls were included because they were made in late 2018, during the period that this working paper was being written, and featured those personally witnessed by VOC staff; the remainder were obtained simply by navigating WOIPFG’s website and adding calls according to no particular pattern.

This assay found:

- 17 of the 51 calls were able to be verified by visual inspection of telephone records, which showed dates, numbers called, and lengths of call corresponding with WOIPFG’s public audio recordings. In the other cases, VOC was unable to obtain the telephone logs from WOIPFG, and it is likely that they were not preserved by investigators;
- 12 of the 51 telephone were able to be verified as belonging to the hospitals in question. In cases of phone numbers purported to belong to individual doctors, the individual who answered the call claimed not to be the doctor in question. Some of the numbers may have been disconnected after the investigative calls, whether or not this was due to the numbers being exposed.

This means that 29 of the 51 were able to verified by either inspection of the telephone records or dialing back the numbers associated with the calls. VOC did not attempt to verify the telephone numbers dialed in Dr. Wang’s late-2018 investigation, given that they belonged to individual surgeons rather than a public institution like a hospital. In the cases of hospitals we telephoned and were able to verify, we could not find matching telephone records in the files we were able to obtain from WOIPFG investigators. This is likely due to WOIPFG’s incomplete recordkeeping, particularly prior to a time its process was being put under scrutiny.

If we had created the sample the other way — looking at the telephone logs we *were* able to obtain from WOIPFG investigators, then located those calls among WOIPFG’s public records — the call assay would likely have featured many more verifications. In fact, this is the procedure followed in the “telephone record review” section below. The assay outcome is largely a result of WOIPFG not having kept (or not currently being able to locate) telephone logs corresponding to the calls in the sample. It is hoped that further engagement with WOIPFG investigators may yield some of these files.

### 2.2.2. Observation

VOC staff observed five calls made by three investigators, including personal observation

of two calls by Dr. Wang in October 2018, and computer observation of two calls by other investigators. In the latter case, this meant setting up a screen sharing session prior to the call, observing the number inputted, and listening to/observing the call in process. This took place in May and June 2019.

### **2.2.3. Telephone record review**

VOC obtained three sets of telephone records made by three investigators over different time periods. These include:

1. Investigator A: Call records from June to December 2015 showing 3,535 calls to China reaching a total of 1,157 unique numbers. VOC identified six of them which appeared as recordings on the WOIPFG website and verified that the call durations, phone numbers, and dates given in the phone logs corresponded to the public data. (See Appendix 2.)
2. Investigator B: Call records from October 2015 to July 2016 showing 2158 calls to China reaching a total of 1247 unique numbers. VOC identified six corresponding to public WOIPFG calls as above. (See Appendix 2.)
3. Dr. Wang Zhiyuan: call records from July 6-19 2018 showing 23 calls to about 15 unique numbers and records from late 2018 showing dozens of call attempts, resulting in 17 successful calls. VOC matched five of these calls to recordings on the WOIPFG website. (See Appendix 2.)

### **2.2.4. Telephone record access**

VOC staff were given the user access credentials of one investigator, with which we downloaded their call records from their account on the website of a Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) software; we observed Dr. Wang logging into the website of the telephone company corresponding to his account and observed the records of calls just dialed (in late 2018); we observed one investigator, via screen sharing, log into their VOIP software account and download the call records. Though we did not personally obtain, or observe WOIPFG investigators obtain, the call records we used to cross-check the public audio files, we were satisfied as to the veracity of those records given their identity in file format (either csv or pdf files) and detailed technical content with those we did obtain. In each case they matched the format, and as above, matched publicly available calls. Samples of the raw files are provided in Appendix 3 for reference.

### **2.2.5. Admission of call veracity by a Chinese official**

In June 2007, as part of the Chinese authorities attempt to claim the calls were falsified, one doctor inadvertently provided perhaps the strongest possible evidence of at least one call's authenticity: a personal admission, albeit backhanded, that he was indeed the individual on the other end of the call admitting to being able to obtain, and having obtained, organs from Falun Gong sources. David Matas, an international human rights lawyer and pioneering researcher of organ transplant abuse in China, documented the incident in 2012.

The primary evidence is a May 22, 2006 telephone call between an investigator and Lu Guoping, a doctor from the Nanning Minzu Hospital in Guangxi Province.<sup>7</sup> During a 12 minute exchange he first says that he cannot “currently” obtain organs from Falun Gong sources, because “right now it’s being managed very strictly.” Then, after being warmed up by the caller, several times throughout the conversation answers “yes yes yes” that in fact, such organs (supposedly “healthy”) are available. He explains that such organs are “difficult to obtain,” but available at “wholesale prices” and obtained through prisons. He says that “of course we’ll choose the good ones,” and that the hospital he recommends the investigator to can obtain such organs “very easily.” He further says that his hospital has transplanted organs from Falun Gong donors in the past, but that “it’s not that every hospital can get these, it’s a matter of relationships. Whoever has the tightest relationships can get them.” Also, “now these organs are very scarce so that’s why some hospitals can get them and some can’t.” (The call was made in May 2006, two months after the initial public allegations of organ harvesting from Falun Gong.) The term “Falun Gong” is used about 20 times throughout the conversation, with the caller gaining assurance, comment, and elaboration from Dr. Lu multiple times.<sup>8</sup>

In a documentary produced by the semi-official Chinese broadcast outlet Phoenix Television, Dr. Lu is shown holding a transcript of the call in which he reads out what he was supposed to have said, then refutes that his answer was that cited; in other parts, he refutes that those questions were asked at all.<sup>9</sup> He acknowledges that he received the call and spoke to the investigator, yet denies the admissions he is quoted saying. It appears that at the date of the Phoenix broadcast neither WOIPFG nor David Matas and his co-author, former Canadian parliamentarian David Kilgour, had published or revealed that they had the audio file. As Matas writes: “[N]either the doctor [n]or the interviewer make any attempt to explain how we could possibly have got the voice of the doctor on a recording saying what he denies saying, interspersed seamlessly with what he admits saying, if he did not say what he denies saying.”<sup>10</sup> The contrast between Dr. Lu’s denials

---

<sup>7</sup> The actual identity of the caller is confidential and is not known to VOC. We understand that in 2006, David Matas requested that the researcher make the call on his behalf, and David Matas and David Kilgour were the first to provide information about the call on their website. In 2013, the call appeared as part of the WOIPFG catalogue and the caller was identified as a WOIPFG investigator (cf. WOIPFG, “追查国际关于中共活体摘取法轮功学员器官 证据专辑 [WOIPFG Compilation of Evidence on the Chinese Communist Party’s Organ Harvesting of Falun Gong].”) Given that WOIPFG is a volunteer organization, the definition of who constitutes a WOIPFG investigator is likely to be fluid. Our surmise is that the investigator had, prior to being contacted by David Matas through his own channels, done calls for WOIPFG; then, she did this (and possibly other) calls for David Matas and provided him with the materials; later, she then resumed making calls for WOIPFG. In 2013, WOIPFG presented the call as one performed by a WOIPFG investigator.

<sup>8</sup> The full transcript and audio are available at WOIPFG, “调查录音11、对广西民族医院肾移植科卢国平医生的调查记录 [Investigation Record 11. Investigation Record of Dr. Lu Guoping, Department of Kidney Transplantation, Guangxi Minzu Hospital].”

<sup>9</sup> The original broadcast reference is 社会能见度 [Social Visibility program], 对“大卫”调查报告的调查 [An Investigation into the “Davids” Investigation]. However, it is no longer available on the official Phoenix website. Versions circulate on YouTube and have been preserved. Relevant excerpts from the documentary and other primary materials are preserved at Matas and Kilgour, “Index of /Dr.Lu-Voice-Recording.”

<sup>10</sup> Matas, “Cover up of Organ Transplant Sourcing in China.”

interspersed with what he actually said have subsequently been highlighted by WOIPFG in their own documentary.

The available evidence from the case thus appears to equate to an admission of the veracity of the call, coupled with a weak denial of its content, easily contradicted by consulting the actual call recording. This is as far as we are aware the only official confirmation of the veracity of this investigative work, and ironically, the unexpected result of the propaganda authorities' best efforts at denial. It also appears to be the last time a major Beijing-linked documentary outlet has sought to discredit the allegations of organ harvesting.

### **2.2.6. Cancelled: Forensic verification**

One of the more promising leads in attempting to scientifically verify at least a portion of WOIPFG's calls was the use of forensic voice authentication software. Such software uses statistical techniques to identify a voice signature, and would, in theory, have been able to indicate with a certain degree of confidence that voices on two recordings (one from WOIPFG, one from official Chinese media) belonged to the same individual.

Enquiries and discussions with a number of professionals in the field, however, revealed that this means of verification would produce a highly unreliable outcome given the difference in recording mechanisms between the known recordings (Chinese officials and doctors speaking to Chinese broadcast media) and the unconfirmed recordings (audio files of them speaking on the telephone).

Allen Combs, a forensic audio specialist, explained that the method by which the investigative recording was made means that the frequency response of the speaker's voice would have degraded considerably in the process of being recorded (i.e., beginning with the human voice of the speaker, to their cell phone microphone, to the recording device of the investigator's computer). Comparing this to an audio from a broadcast would produce a highly unreliable result, he said, adding that if he personally attempted to test two such samples made with his own voice, it might only yield a match of 40%. This technical obstacle meant that the investigative calls could not be submitted to biometric analysis as hoped.<sup>11</sup>

## **2.3. Discussion of the authenticity of the calls**

---

<sup>11</sup> Incidentally, this method would still have been open to objection by any party so inclined. As Combs explained: "Voice comparison analysis is in a kind of precarious spot. Some experts say it is hard science and certainly dependable in ascertaining the identity of an individual. Others say it is junk science, meaning there isn't any real scientific data to support making any kind of opinion from voice recordings... I tend to fall somewhere in the middle. I think there are certainly markers and measurements you can do with human voices and under certain circumstances you can narrow the pool of potential providers of a voice to a much smaller group... The FBI uses biometric testing as a way to quickly narrow a pool of potential suspects to direct the investigation further. That is how I do it, too. It isn't really something you could use in court as solid proof that it is or is not the same person, but gives you a measure of how close the two samples are." Email correspondence, January 2, 2019.

We believe we have taken every reasonable and feasible precaution to establish the veracity of the telephone calls provided by WOIPFG. We believe that there is a large body of evidence supporting the conclusion that the audio files and transcripts claimed to be covert telephone calls by WOIPFG investigators to hospitals in China are indeed just that.

We have obtained telephone records ourselves using investigator-provided credentials, observed investigators download call records, cross-checked call records with the details of publicly available call audios, and ourselves dialed a dozen of the numbers and confirmed that they belong to the hospitals identified.

The present version of the working paper (Version 1, published February 2020) does not include a complete analysis of every part of the evidentiary chain for a series of specific calls. That is, we cannot always be sure that the telephone logs that we accessed or witnessed being accessed correspond to the same calls which appear on the telephone logs we obtained from WOIPFG investigators which we then used to call hospitals in China. This is because typically we would witness the telephone logs being accessed electronically, then receive a cache of those downloads; but we did not specifically track one call, or a series of calls, from sighting it being accessed, to checking it against the audio file, to calling back the number and confirming the hospital. In part, this is due to the difficulty of gaining the trust of and interacting with individual WOIPFG investigators, who must often be contacted through intermediaries via encrypted communication software, and who are not always available or willing to submit to the kind of exacting scrutiny we are attempting in this working paper. It also reflects the sometimes fluid relationship between the WOIPFG volunteer network and its public representatives. Version 2 of the report will feature a number of cases where the same telephone logs that have been personally downloaded by VOC staff (using, it is hoped, the user credentials of the investigators themselves) are used to identify published WOIPFG calls, whose numbers are dialed back to confirm the hospital. Despite this, we believe the current report's verification of different telephone calls at different parts of the evidentiary chain convincingly demonstrates that the calls are real. We anticipate that the next iteration in the verification process will be straightforward, given WOIPFG's enhanced understanding of the attention their work is receiving and the need that it be corroborated by a third party.

We believe that the WOIPFG investigation process has been subjected to sufficient scrutiny such that if investigators were orchestrating these calls with known parties in China pretending to be doctors and nurses, this would have been clear by now. It is difficult to even conceive as to how these calls may have been falsified.

In straining to imagine an exceedingly remote, hypothetical scenario, we considered: perhaps Falun Gong activists in China got jobs at transplant hospitals, and then play-acted in the audio recordings, saying that organs were available for such-and-such price. But even with a moment's consideration it becomes clear that this scenario is implausible and impractical in the extreme, given that thousands of calls have been made

over a decade to hundreds of hospitals across the country. Thousands of calls have been dialed to hospitals across the country at different times of the day, with hundreds of unique hospital staff, both doctors and nurses, featuring in a variety of discussions with investigators. Of course, such an elaborate conspiracy is impossible to disprove, but there is no evidence that it has taken place.

Therefore, we conclude that WOIPFG's telephone investigation into organ trafficking at hospitals in China is genuine, and accept the audio files as genuine discussions between investigators and hospital staff.

Having established this constitutes only half the task, however. The question remains as to what evidentiary value about China's organ transplantation system the content of the calls provide.

### **3. Themes for further study**

Having established that the audio files provided by WOIPFG are actually calls to medical workers in China as claimed, it is possible to consider the various ways in which they might be analyzed as a body of evidence and how they may contribute to understanding of organ transplantation in China. The first task should be a thorough analysis of the call content.

#### **3.1. Analysis of call content**

The following steps should be taken for transforming the calls from audio files (and transcripts) into variable-based data for quantitative analysis:

1. All calls put into a database with the hospital name, person spoken to, number dialed, date, time, length of call, anonymized investigator ID, assumed identity (i.e. relative of organ recipient, security official, etc.) and links to the full transcript and audio file.
2. Data can be extracted from many of the calls, which answer questions such as:
  - a. Whether the call recipient claimed the availability of an organ.
  - b. How long they advised the wait would be.
  - c. Whether they were asked about the identity of the donor.
  - d. Whether they responded in the affirmative when asked if the organ source was Falun Gong.
  - e. Whether they were asked how many transplants had been performed over the last day, week, month, or year. If so, their answer.

No doubt, more time spent with the transcripts would open up more questions as to the kind of data that could be fruitfully coded.

#### **3.2. Questions of bias**

Questions of bias are ubiquitous in scholarship on the anti-Falun Gong campaign, both in

relation to Chinese Communist Party sources and to materials generated by Falun Gong-associated organizations. Most often, these discussions are put in general terms — that Falun Gong is a contentious topic, that practitioners are persecuted, that they are highly motivated to foster positive perceptions about themselves and negative perceptions about the Communist Party<sup>12</sup> — and the reader is left to draw their own conclusion as to source reliability.

Much can also be made of the distinctive communication style and grassroots methods used by Falun Gong practitioners in their efforts to gain recognition in the global public sphere for the severe persecution against them in China. Often, these representations are taken as a failure to adhere to Western professional norms. Falun Gong-associated organizations are almost always run by volunteers without trained staff or funding. Many are run by individuals who have fled persecution in China. As a consequence, their communications often convey an aesthetic — reflected in the non-native English, the tone, even the choice of font — that can seem unfamiliar and lacking in credibility to the educated Western audiences they seek to reach. These differences in aesthetic seem to contribute to a sense that WOIPFG fails to meet the implicit expectations of how a civil society group in a liberal democratic polity should comport itself. The reasons for this difference are understandable, if not overdetermined, yet they conspire to further marginalize Falun Gong human rights issues.

While these tendencies do not necessarily have any effect on the quality of the material the organizations generate, and strictly speaking they are orthogonal to the validity of the data for social science research, perceptions matter. Along with the gravity of the anti-Falun Gong campaign, the concerted efforts at discrediting Falun Gong by Chinese authorities, and the resultant representational politics, the manner in which Falun Gong practitioners have sought to tell their story has likely *contributed to a perception* that Falun Gong-associated organizations are not suitable sources of reliable information.

One of the objectives driving this report has been to pierce through these superficial impressions, often circulated among Western elites whose professional activities touch on Falun Gong in some way, and to demonstrate that, at the very least, WOIPFG's calls are what they seem to be.

The extraordinary challenges that WOIPFG has faced in gathering this data must be acknowledged. All of its contributors are volunteers, and many of them are political asylees who have fled persecution in their homelands. Many had no prior experience in advocacy or research, let alone the highly unusual method of investigation they have pioneered in these telephone calls. Ironically, one of the signs of WOIPFG's success in the task is that doctors and nurses, particularly in recent years, seem to be on guard against investigative phone calls. In a cache of calls we obtained, some of which WOIPFG did not make public, staff regularly ask why the caller's number is coming from

---

<sup>12</sup> See for instance Tong, *Revenge of the Forbidden City: The Suppression of the Falungong in China, 1999-2005*, 27–31; Junker, *Becoming Activists in Global China: Social Movements in the Chinese Diaspora*, 7.

overseas, or is blocked. The investigator responds by saying that it's cheaper to call via computer, then quickly changes the topic and continues their questioning. In the instances where VOC verified phone numbers by telephoning hospitals in China, doctors often asked "Where are you calling from?" This wariness also increases the worth of the calls that do result in valuable exchanges.

WOIPFG's ability to engage in this form of research appears to rely, in part, on secrecy around its methods. This is due to the adversarial nature of its attempt to gather the information in the first place. WOIPFG investigators feel that exposing their methods too much may undermine their efficacy, given that Chinese authorities would then be able to take countermeasures.

It is clear from the analysis in the first part of this working paper that WOIPFG has in fact been making telephone calls to China and speaking to medical workers. What is not clear is the extent to which deficits in WOIPFG's methodology introduce selection or other biases into the data, and further, the extent to which this may attenuate its evidentiary value. In the end, answers to these questions must depend on how the data is being used.

The most obvious issue is the matter of selection bias in the calls that we have access to. This involves two issues: 1) that the total body of calls they have posted publicly is roughly representative of the total calls they made; 2) that the hospitals they targeted are roughly representative of the Chinese transplant hospital system. The evidentiary value of the call records depends on at least the second part of this assumption being true.

The first problem is that we do not know how many calls — involving a substantive exchange with medical personnel — that ended in a null result on the questions of interest. That is, of every call in which a doctor or nurse said that an organ would be available in two weeks, how many *other times* did they say that an organ would be available in a year, or not available at all? We do not know the answer to this question, though further engagement with WOIPFG, review of its raw call log data, and interviews with investigators may help to answer it. From what VOC can gather, WOIPFG does not have a single list of all the calls its staff have made to China since 2006. In fact, a list so defined would by itself be unhelpful in answering the question, because often one substantive call may involve dozens of failed dials. Many attempted calls simply ring out, are busy, or are picked up by a harried transplant ward staff unwilling to answer questions. The total number of substantive calls made to China by WOIPFG personnel, which they turned in an audio file and transcript, appears to be approximately 500.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> This approximate figure is derived from using the `fetchurl.sh` script (available at <https://github.com/adamdehaven/fetchurls.git>) on the <https://www.zhuichaguoji.org/> domain, downloading the mp3 files captured across the entire site, and establishing via visual inspection of all links, and audio inspection of a sample of them after exclusion of duplicates, that they were investigative audio files. See Additional file 2 for the resulting URL list of over 700 mp3 files (including duplicates). WOIPFG may later publish a more accurate count.

Even so, the inferences we can draw based on this missing data are also not immediately clear. If only one in ten substantive conversations between investigators and hospital staff resulted in an admission (promise of short waiting time, or admission of prisoner of conscience organ sourcing) and the remainder did not, it could mean *either* that the organs were genuinely not available, *or* that hospital staff had been instructed not to give away that information on the phone. Thus, the fundamental information asymmetry at play, where WOIPFG is attempting to gather information that the Chinese state is attempting to keep secret, means in effect that *any* revelation of illicit data is still useful information for the purposes of investigating whether organ trafficking is taking place. The missingness of the data simply means that we may need to exercise somewhat more caution in making inferences from the data that is available, since the data we do have may not accurately represent the prevalence of the phenomenon. Yet we have no way of knowing whether it underestimates or overestimates; even knowing the number of null results would not solve this problem, though it would be valuable.

The second problem of representativeness means that we must be sure that of the 173 transplant hospitals in China, WOIPFG did not only focus on a dozen or so politically connected locations, neglecting the rest while making claims about systematic abuses. While answering this question with precision will need to wait until all available calls are put into a spreadsheet, a general survey of the calls indicates that WOIPFG did indeed contact hospitals in almost every province and reached the majority of China's total transplant centers.

Limited available data can shed some light on these problems. VOC obtained a cache of just over 190 call recordings and transcripts made between August 2013 and January 2016.<sup>14</sup> Given the incomplete record-keeping of WOIPFG investigators, we were only able to obtain the raw phone logs the period June to December 2015, which corresponds to 122 recorded and transcribed phone calls. Yet during this period (June to December 2015), this single, highly productive WOIPFG investigator, dialed a total of 3,535 calls to China, reaching 1,157 unique numbers, for an average call length of 2 minutes and 58 seconds (for the 816 calls over 30 seconds duration. The remaining 2,719 were of zero duration or only a few seconds, evidently meeting with busy messages or similar.) Of these, 319 calls lasted over 2 minutes. How many of these made it into WOIPFG's archive is unclear — it is precisely this call cache that featured the questions from nurses asking why the caller sounded like they were on an overseas line.

The use of this data in social science research is feasible, as long as appropriate caveats are made about what we know and do not know. Moreover, an important remaining question is how we might interpret the admissions or responses that are made to investigators. This is the next important line of inquiry on the topic, and should be explored when using the calls in research.

The political scientist Alexander Lee wrote the following in the context of dealing with

---

<sup>14</sup> These files are held confidentially by VOC for the protection of WOIPFG's methods. They may be made available to interested analysts for verification purposes.

archival material, and it is appropriate guidance in this case too: “scholars should become familiar with the internal procedures and personalities of the institution that produced a particular set of sources, so as to be familiar with both the biases inherent in the written material, and what parts of the archive are appropriate for study.”<sup>15</sup> In a similar vein, as Gabriel Almond argued in his landmark study of communism: “It is quite clear from the foregoing that the data used in this study fail to fulfill the canons of scientific method. But the scholar who wishes to make a contribution to the understanding of a significant social problem is free to adapt scientific methodology to what is possible, so long as he avoids overstating his case.”<sup>16</sup> We hope we have achieved that in this brief working paper.

## 4. References

- Almond, Gabriel Abraham. *Appeals of Communism*. Princeton University Press, 2019.
- Falun Dafa Information Center. “What Is Falun Gong?” FalunInfo. Accessed January 19, 2020. <https://faluninfo.net/>.
- Joint Standing Committee On Foreign Affairs, Defence And Trade. “Human Organ Trafficking and Organ Transplant Tourism (Jun 08, 2018).” Commonwealth of Australia Official Committee Hansard, June 8, 2018. [https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/commjnt/92facda1-3e53-4555-99f9-ebd340b98ca6/toc\\_pdf/Joint%20Standing%20Committee%20on%20Foreign%20Affairs,%20Defence%20and%20Trade\\_2018\\_06\\_08\\_6206\\_Official.pdf;fileType=application/pdf](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/commjnt/92facda1-3e53-4555-99f9-ebd340b98ca6/toc_pdf/Joint%20Standing%20Committee%20on%20Foreign%20Affairs,%20Defence%20and%20Trade_2018_06_08_6206_Official.pdf;fileType=application/pdf).
- Junker, Andrew. *Becoming Activists in Global China: Social Movements in the Chinese Diaspora*. Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- Lee, Alexander. “How (and How Not) to Use Archival Sources in Political Science.” University of Rochester, January 16, 2015. [http://www.rochester.edu/college/faculty/alexander\\_lee/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/archives.pdf](http://www.rochester.edu/college/faculty/alexander_lee/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/archives.pdf).
- Matas, David. “Cover up of Organ Transplant Sourcing in China.” presented at the Doctors Against Forced Organ Harvesting panel on organ trafficking in China, Metropole Hotel, Geneva, Switzerland, December 17, 2012. <https://dafoh.org/cover-up-of-organ-transplant-sourcing-in-china-presentation-by-david-matas-on-december-17-2012-in-geneva/>.
- Matas, David, and David Kilgour. “Index of /Dr.Lu-Voice-Recording.” Organ Harvest Investigation, October 5, 2014. <http://organharvestinvestigation.net/Dr.Lu-Voice-Recording/>.
- Tong, James W. *Revenge of the Forbidden City: The Suppression of the Falungong in China, 1999-2005*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
- WOIPFG. “调查录音11、对广西民族医院肾移植科卢国平医生的调查记录 [Investigation Record 11. Investigation Record of Dr. Lu Guoping, Department of Kidney Transplantation, Guangxi Minzu Hospital].” World Organization to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong, November 9, 2013. [http://www.zhuichaguoji.org/node/46728#\\_Toc366574834](http://www.zhuichaguoji.org/node/46728#_Toc366574834).
- . “追查国际 关于中共活体摘取法轮功学员器官 证据专辑 [WOIPFG Compilation of Evidence on the Chinese Communist Party’s Organ Harvesting of Falun Gong],” January 6,

---

<sup>15</sup> Lee, “How (and How Not) to Use Archival Sources in Political Science,” 2.

<sup>16</sup> Almond, *Appeals of Communism*, xiv.

2014.

[http://www.zhuichaguoji.org/sites/default/files/record/2013/09/35848-35848\\_updated\\_report.pdf](http://www.zhuichaguoji.org/sites/default/files/record/2013/09/35848-35848_updated_report.pdf).

- . “追查国际调查取证中共活摘器官现场录像（1-5） [On-Site Video of WOIPFG Investigation of Organ Harvesting (1-5)].” World Organization to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong, May 8, 2019. <https://www.zhuichaguoji.org/node/111517>.
- . “追查迫害法轮功国际组织成立声明 [Statement on the Establishment of the World Organization to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong].” World Organization to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong, January 20, 2003. <https://www.zhuichaguoji.org/node/49>.
- 社会能见度 [Social Visibility program]. 对“大卫”调查报告的调查 [*An Investigation into the “Davids” Investigation*]. Documentary. People’s Republic of China: Phoenix Television, 2007. [https://web.archive.org/web/20190528003543/http://vip.v.ifeng.com/new/list\\_399.shtml](https://web.archive.org/web/20190528003543/http://vip.v.ifeng.com/new/list_399.shtml); [https://web.archive.org/web/20190528003236/http://vip.v.ifeng.com/new/doc/list\\_359.shtml](https://web.archive.org/web/20190528003236/http://vip.v.ifeng.com/new/doc/list_359.shtml); [https://web.archive.org/web/20190528001408/http://anticult.kaiwind.com/zlk/lshg/dazz/200711/15/t20071115\\_822867.shtml](https://web.archive.org/web/20190528001408/http://anticult.kaiwind.com/zlk/lshg/dazz/200711/15/t20071115_822867.shtml).